

## Fact Sheet: Department Stores Surveillance Update: 1993-1999

### Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project

Occupational Health Surveillance Program

Bureau of Health Statistics, Research and Evaluation

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

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### Background

Department stores are the fourth most common place of employment for Massachusetts teens. In 1996, the midpoint of the surveillance period, more than 3,000 15-17-year-olds in Massachusetts worked in department stores. These teens represent 4% of all working 15-17-year-olds in Massachusetts. Department stores are the fifth most common place of occupational injury among teen workers in Massachusetts. Of the 3,389 injuries identified by the *Teens at Work Project* from 1993-1999, 4% occurred in department stores.

### Gender

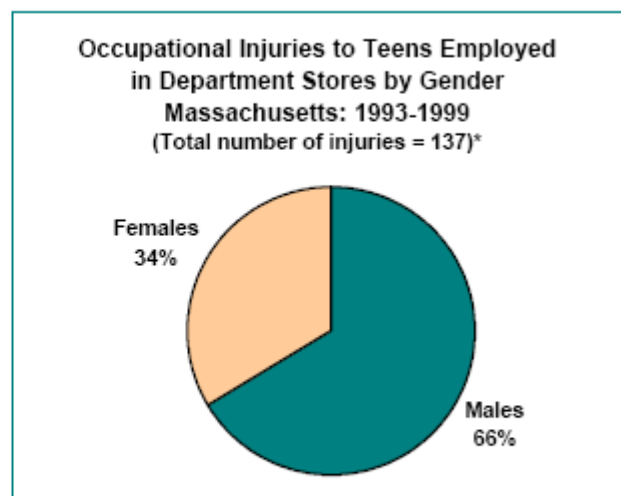
- Males make up slightly less than half (49%) of the teens employed in department stores during 1996, the midpoint of the six-year surveillance period (**Figure 1**).
- Almost 70% of all injuries to teen department store workers occurred among males (**Figure 2**).
- Young males are at higher risk for injury than young females working in department stores based on employment percentages for 1996. The difference may be explained, at least in part, by the assignment of young males to higher risk jobs within the department store industry.

**Figure 1.**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,  
Current Population Survey: 1996

**Figure 2.**



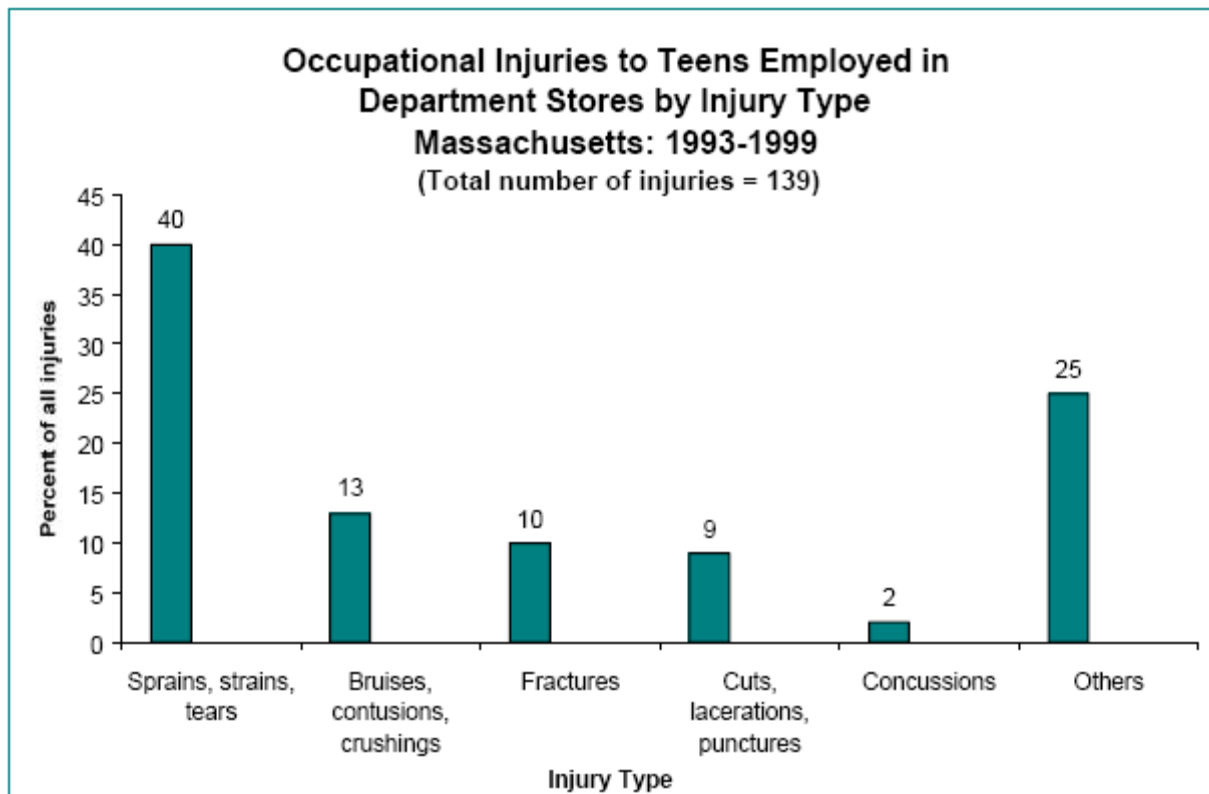
Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
BHSR&E, OHSP

\* Information on gender was unavailable for two cases.

## Injury Type

- Sprains, strains, and tears were the most common types of injuries sustained in department stores, accounting for 40% of all injuries (**Figure 3**).
- The second most common types of injuries sustained in department stores were bruises, contusions, and crushings (13%); followed by fractures (10%) (**Figure 3**).
- One-tenth of all injuries were fractures. Department stores have the highest proportion of fractures than any of the other industries highlighted in these fact sheets. Fractures affected the upper extremities in almost two-thirds of the cases, including the wrists (29%) and hands, arms, and fingers (29%).
- Cuts, lacerations, and punctures were the injuries reported most frequently by hospital emergency departments, whereas sprains, strains, and tears were the injuries most frequently identified through Workers' Compensation claims. If all hospital emergency departments in Massachusetts reported cases to the surveillance system, cuts, lacerations, and punctures would be more predominant.

**Figure 3.**



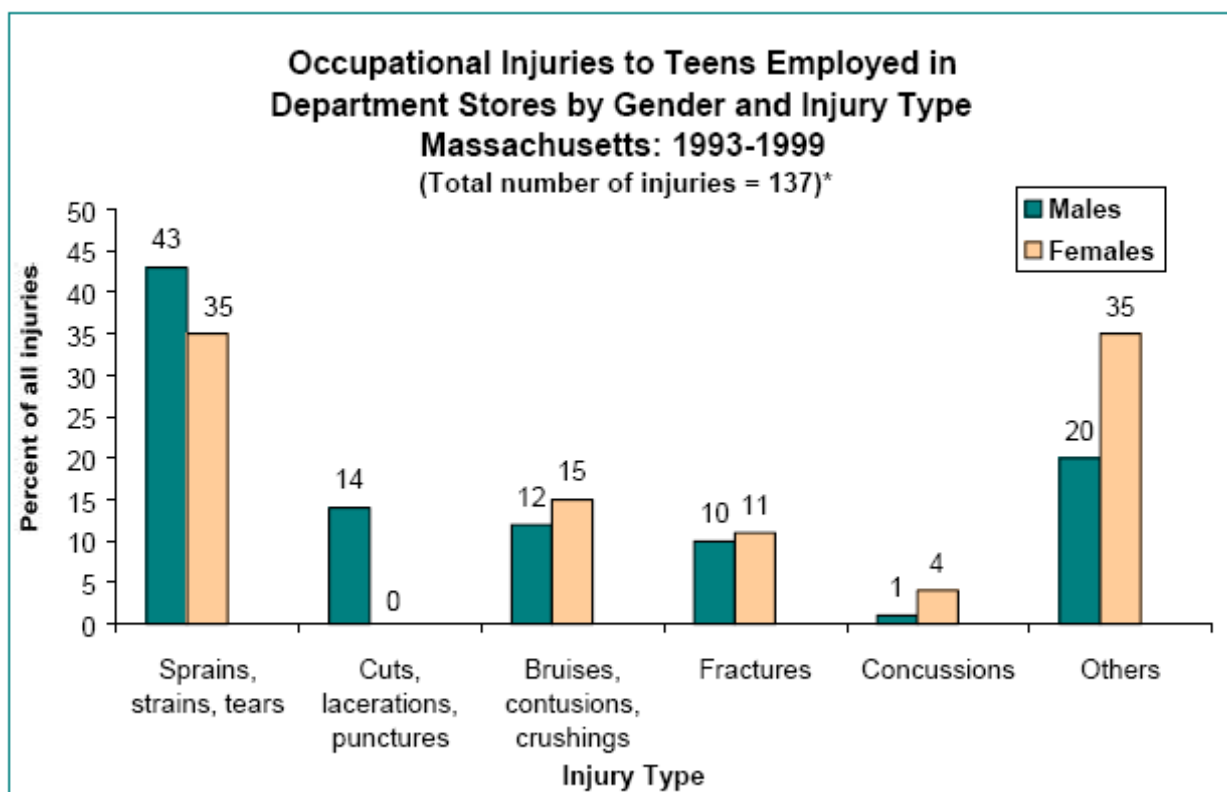
Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

## Injury Type by Gender

○ Injury type varied by gender for Massachusetts teens working in department stores. Sprains, strains, and tears (43%) were the most common injuries reported among males; followed by cuts, lacerations, and punctures (14%) (**Figure 4**). In contrast, none of the injuries reported among females were cuts, lacerations, or punctures.

○ The injury distributions by gender do not necessarily mean that females are at a higher risk for particular injuries. Further research is needed to determine why the kinds of injuries sustained by young male workers differ from those sustained by young female workers. These differences might be explained, at least in part, by the different tasks assigned to young male and female workers.

**Figure 4.**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

\*Information on gender was unavailable for two cases.

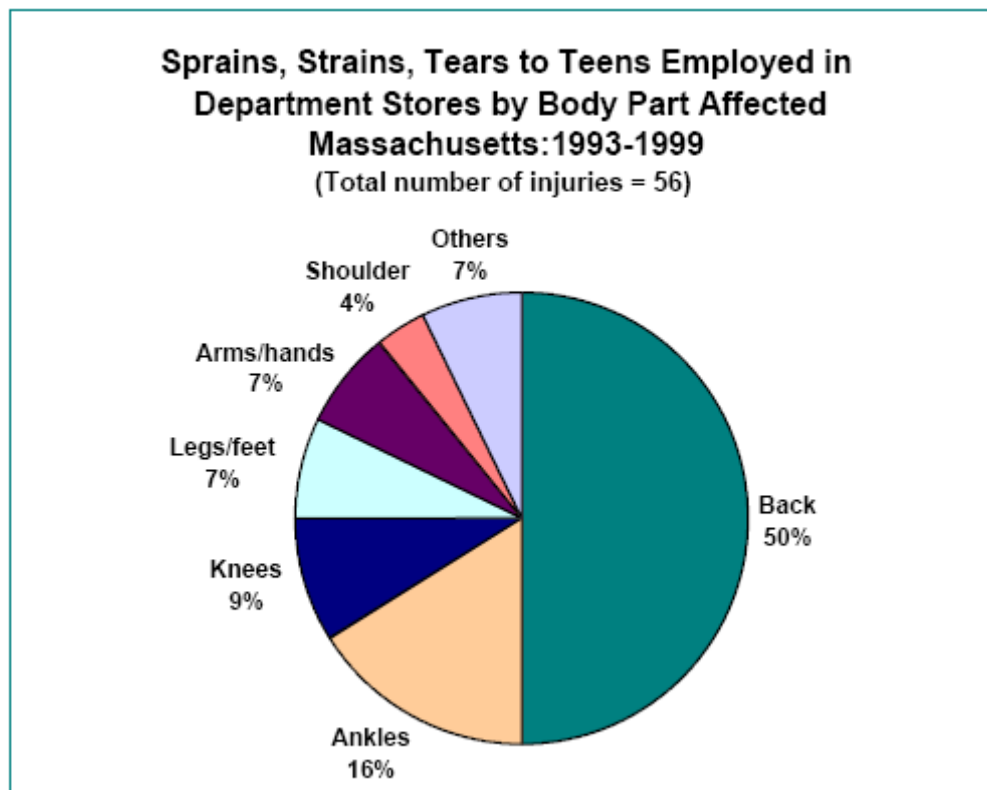
## Sprains, Strains, and Tears

*I was on a ladder removing diapers from a shipping box, which was on the top shelf. When I came down off of the ladder, a large box from the top shelf fell and struck me on the head. (I have been struck with falling items before.) I told my supervisor about the accident, and then finished my shift. In the days following the accident, the pain got worse and it was difficult to move.*

16-year-old sales clerk

- Half of all sprains, strains, and tears affected the back (**Figure 5**). Back injuries are of particular concern because workers with back injuries may be at increased risk for subsequent back injuries.
- The lower extremities, including the ankles (16%), knees (9%), and legs/feet (7%), were affected in approximately one-third of the cases.
- Descriptive information regarding injury circumstances was available for 46 cases. Lifting and moving merchandise was listed as the cause of injury in half the cases. Slipping and falling was listed as the cause of injury in 17% of the cases, and being struck by falling objects was listed as the source of injury for 13% of the cases.

**Figure 5.**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

## What Injured Teens Have to Say

*Teens at Work Project* staff completed telephone interviews with 23 young department store workers injured on-the-job. While the information from these interviews is not necessarily representative of all young department store workers who have been injured, it nevertheless provides some important insights. Of these interviewed teens:

- Thirty-three percent reported they had received no on-the-job training about how to work safely and avoid injury.
- Seventeen percent reported they had no work permits (or educational certificates) for their jobs at the time they were injured. *NOTE: Massachusetts child labor laws require permits or certificates which are obtained through the school district where the teen resides.*
- As a result of their injuries, teens reported their usual activities were curtailed an average of 40 days.
- Seventy percent believed their injuries were preventable.